

## Dragonshards

# The Elves of Aerenal, Part Two

By Keith Baker



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### The Dead and the Deathless

The Aereni elves care for all of their dead. The elves have perfected the art of embalming, and some practice this trade in the great cities of Khorvaire. As an elf's body is prepared for burial, two chronicles of her life are made. One copy is buried with her body and one kept in the great library of Shae Mordai; thus she will never be forgotten, and anyone who finds her body in a future age will know of her deeds. The bodies of the fallen are preserved in catacombs that stretch deep beneath the cities of Aerenal, filled with the assembled dead of thirty thousand years. Grave robbing is considered a heinous crime in Aerenal, and someone who knowingly transgresses against the fallen may be killed and cremated, with no record made of his death.

The elves reserve the gift of immortality for their greatest heroes. The Aereni respect knowledge and wisdom as well as martial skill, and the Undying Court includes sages and artists and well as warriors and wizards. But most elves are consigned to the catacombs after death. Traditionally an elf can become deathless only after she has lived three centuries. The Priests of Transition view life as a journey, with undeath as a destination; even those worthy of the honor must experience a full life to appreciate what comes next. However, an elf who shows great promise may be raised from the dead, so that she can continue on the path of life.

A deathless elf does not automatically become a member of the Undying Court. Military heroes usually become undying soldiers; they continue to defend the nation and exist in the catacombs and all of the major cities of Aerenal. Newly raised undying councilors serve as sages and administrators -- although the living perform the most vital tasks, so that they may complete the journey of life and avoid becoming dependant on the Undying. After a thousand years, a councilor is considered for admittance into the court, where she will tend the ascendant councilors and study with the elders. What happens next is a mystery the mortal mind cannot understand; the ascendant councilors are truly alien beings who are thousands of years old and charged with the energy of Irian.

### The Magic of Aerenal

The elves of Aerenal were using *continual flame* while humans were struggling with fire. Each generation has added new enchantments and artifacts to the great cities of the island, and Pylas Talaer has magical wonders that outshine even Sharn. Many cities contain buried orbs enchanted with a powerful form of *prestidigitation*; people passing through an Aereni city may hear ghostly music, and they will find that their clothing, hair, and skin remains perfectly clean. Rumors claim that the nobles maintain a network of teleportation gates that connect the great cities, but if these tales are true, the gates are reserved for the important business of the nobility.

The elves of Aerenal consider arcane magic to be both a science and an art. Most elves have a natural gift for wizardry and find it far easier to follow this path than humans do. While most of the inhabitants of Aerenal are commoners or experts, many possess a level or two of wizard, and professional wizards are as common on Aerenal as magewrights are in Khorvaire. While there is a general interest in necromancy, most of these wizards focus on practical magic -- *Tenser's floating disk*, *unseen servant*, *prestidigitation*, *magecraft*, and similar spells.

While many consider necromancy to be the magic of death, for the Aereni it is far more. In studying death, the Aereni wizard learns about life. In studying fear, he learns about hope. To the elves of Aerenal, the study of necromancy is as much a philosophical voyage as a quest for power; the wizard's ability to strike down his enemy with a *ray of enfeeblement* is a side benefit of his work, not the point of it. The one path that the Aereni avoid is the creation of negatively charged undead: vampires, liches, wraiths, and the like. The Aereni believe that these creatures are anathema to life. According to Aereni lore, the deathless are sustained by the energy of Irian and the devotion of their descendents -- energy that is freely given. Negative undead take the energy they need to survive -- siphoning away the life energy of Eberron itself. Karrnathi necromancers scoff at this belief, but the Aereni take it very seriously.

Aerenal contains a number of manifest zones that are closely linked to Mabar and Irian. These empower necromantic spells, and Aereni wizards and clerics have developed a number of necromantic rituals that can be performed only in these areas. While deathless can leave the island, the Aereni believe that the Undying Court relies on the energy of Irian to maintain its bond to this plane of existence; as a result, the ascendant councilors of the court rarely venture from Shae Mordai, which is the site of the largest of the Irian zones.

## Style and Customs

The Aereni seek perfection in everything that they do. Elven clothing is beautiful, typically involving interwoven patterns in two or three different colors. But beyond appearance, Aereni clothing is designed for function: An elven shirt may last its wearer for twenty or thirty years, holding its colors to the end. The elves put equal care into architecture, and some buildings in Shae Mordai are over twenty thousand years old. The elves build their cities from densewood and livewood, creating wooden structures that are just as tough and enduring as buildings of stone.

While the elves take great pleasure in crafting things of beauty, they have unusual ideas about physical beauty. To a follower of the Undying Court, the body is a temporary vessel. Aging and even death are not things to fear -- they are part of the journey of life. The deathless do slowly decompose, and to an elf who plans to spend eternity as one of the undying, physical beauty is a trivial thing. To a large degree, this simply means that the Aereni do not concern themselves with cosmetics to the degree that many other humanoids do. Masks are a common fashion accessory among the elves, and the holy symbol of the Undying Court is a golden mask. Some elves take things a step farther and actually disfigure themselves in life -- abandoning physical beauty to be better prepared for what is to come.

While the Aereni place more importance on mystical knowledge than military might, they still respect the martial traditions of their ancestors. Every elf learns to use sword and bow as a child, and archery and stylized duels are a common form of recreation. For the average elf, this is as much a mental exercise as it is physical. Much like their Tairnadal cousins, the Aereni see war as an art. Aereni soldiers usually rely on speed and skill as opposed to brute force. Swashbucklers and scouts are common among the Aereni, but the island has its fair share of fighters -- deadly warriors focused in the paths of archery or Combat Expertise.

To an outsider, Aereni often seem cold and repressed. This is not actually the case; the elves feel emotions as strongly as any other race. They simply don't display their feelings as blatantly as members of the younger races, and they rarely reveal their thoughts to strangers. Aereni do possess a sense of humor, but it is quite sophisticated; an Aereni joke may take an hour or day to come to fruition. Humans generally find Aereni humor to be dull or confusing, while the elves consider the culture of the Five Nations to be simplistic and crass -- though it can be excused on account of youth.

## Questions to Ask

As an elf from Aerenal, a critical question you need to answer is why you have left your homeland. The Aereni rarely travel; their island is a sacred place, while Khorvaire is a land of chaos and ignorance. You may be searching for a way to achieve your full potential, in the hopes of being raised to the nobility and eventually to the Undying Court. You could be one of the undead hunters of the Deathguard, or a spy in the service of the Cairdal Blades. You may be acting on behalf of your line -- or perhaps you have a patron in the Undying Court itself, who has asked you to be his eyes in the world beyond Shae Mordai. Or perhaps you believe that the culture of Aerenal is stagnant, and you have turned your back on your land, searching for wisdom in the world of the younger races.

Here are some other things you may want to consider:

- What is the history of your line? The line of Jhaelian is deeply spiritual, producing many of the most powerful adepts and clerics of Aerenal. Does your line have a particular tradition of magic or martial skill?
- Who are your parents? One of your biological parents will be a member of the noble house of your line. Do you have a close connection with her, or have you never had a bond?
- The Right of Counsel feat represents a close tie to a particular member of the Undying Court. All Aereni have ancestors in the Undying Court: to earn the Right of Counsel, you have to have performed great deeds or otherwise show remarkable potential. If you have this feat, you and your DM need to decide who your patron is, and how you came to his attention.
- The Aereni elves are raised to be patient. You may live for thousands of years; as an adult elf, you've already lived longer than the average human will. Take your time when making decisions. Don't jump to conclusions or let your emotions force you into rash action. Cultivate calm.
- As an elf of Aerenal, you have been taught that physical appearance is ultimately irrelevant. Don't judge people by their appearance; while others may be seduced by beauty or horrified by disfigurements, to you these are simply transitory aspects of life.

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## About the Author

**Keith Baker** has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the **Eberron** Campaign Setting and *Shadows of the Last War*, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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